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PH 501-ExL SYLLABUS

Introduction to Philosophy of Religion

Summer 2003

Instructor: Kevin Paul Kinghorn

I. WELCOME FROM KEVIN KINGHORN

Welcome! I'm so glad you decided to register for Introduction to Philosophy of Religion this semester. In the first module assignment, you'll get a chance to say why you decided to register for PH501X. My interest in the subject is essentially two-fold. First, as I indicated in my video, I believe that God has called me into a teaching career as a Christian philosopher. Second, I found in seminary that it was the Christian philosophers who were addressing many of the questions I had often asked, such as: Why does God allow people to suffer horrible evil? In fact, I've found that many of the questions I've asked since childhood are addressed by Christian philosophers. Take, for example, the question: Are there bathrooms in heaven? Well, Christian philosophers address this issue. Of course, their discussion usually takes the form of "What constitutes personal identity?" or "What is the relationship between mind and resurrected body?".

It's interesting to me just how many of the 'basic' questions children and youth ask that end up being discussed by professional philosophers of religion. By the way, I have a theory that many adults wonder about the questions children and youth sometimes ask (I know I do); but as adults we're often uneasy about asking 'stupid' questions. Please know that, as far as this class is concerned, there are no stupid questions. If you're new to the subjects we're going to discuss (as I was when I took PH501 at Asbury), consider yourself squarely in the mainstream.

If you've not yet filled out a resume in Asbury's computerized directory of staff and students, let me invite you to do so. It's a good way for us to begin to get to know each other. Include anything you feel comfortable including. Please do feel free to read my resume/personal profile. I'm currently doing some tutoring work at Oxford University, where I last year completed my doctoral studies in philosophical theology. Also, I'm a member of the Kentucky Conference in the United Methodist Church, having spent three years as an assistant pastor at Pikeville, KY UMC. I'm excited to think what I might learn from our time together in this class, and I look forward to being a part of your learning experience this semester, which I pray will better equip you to be an effective ambassador for our Lord Jesus Christ.

II. COURSE AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Broadly speaking, our goal will be to become more effective ministers for the kingdom of God. Part of one's being an effective minister clearly includes being on firm ground oneself as to what one believes. One of our goals this semester will be to gain a deeper personal understanding of the God we embrace, as well as a deeper personal understanding of what it means to have a Christian worldview.

Another part of effective ministry for the kingdom involves being able to address the concerns of those in the modern world who do not embrace Jesus Christ as Lord. This involves understanding why they find Christianity problematic and being able to offer a Christian apologetic to them that makes sense. One of our goals this semester will be to gain a greater preparation to offer to those in our culture "an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1Peter 3:15).

Given that Asbury is a seminary in the Wesleyan tradition, we will also keep an eye toward better understanding how our own Christian background (predominantly, I presume, as Wesleyans) fits into the larger Christian tradition. Such understanding will better allow us to distinguish a non-Christian perspective from a Christian, non-Wesleyan perspective.

More specifically, there are a number of course and learning objectives for PH 501X:

- (1) We will learn to distinguish different types of arguments and to discern good arguments from poor arguments.
- (2) We will learn to identify the different accounts of human freedom found within the Christian tradition.
- (3) We will gain a better understanding of who God is by examining his attributes.
- (4) We will become familiar with the traditional arguments for God's existence and learn to state these arguments in succinct form.
- (5) We will develop our own perspective on the relationship between reason and Christian faith.
- (6) We will examine why people form religious beliefs and under what circumstances people are justified in holding religious beliefs.

(7) We will look at the various religious experiences people testify to having and whether religious experiences should be considered reliable.

(8) We will develop a better understanding of what a miracle is and why some people reject the idea that miracles might occur.

(9) Utilizing the various approaches within the Christian tradition, we will develop our own response to the question: Why does God allow suffering and evil in this world?

(10) We will develop a better appreciation for the ways in which religious investigation is related to scientific investigation.

(11) We will gain a better understanding of how our finite human language can be used to describe an infinite God.

(12) We will examine the relationship between the human mind and the human body, and how this issue impacts discussions on personal identity and the nature of our resurrected 'self'.

(13) We will develop a Christian perspective on the phenomenon of religious diversity and on the fate of those who never hear the gospel message.

(14) We will get a taste for how philosophical analysis can help us better understand such Christian doctrines as the Incarnation and the Atonement.

III. REQUIRED TEXTS

(1) Hasker, William. Metaphysics. (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983).

(2) Peterson, Michael, ed. Reason and Religious Belief. 2nd edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)

(3) Peterson, Michael, ed. Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings. 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

***PLEASE NOTE:** We will hit the ground running this semester, so you will need to have your books by **June 2**, the first day of class. The first assigned paper is **due June 18**.

These books can be ordered from Asbury's bookstore, which you can call (859) 858-4242 or e-mail at exlbooks@asburyseminary.edu.

(While the assigned readings are not especially large in volume, they can be quite dense. I often find myself having to re-read sections; in fact, everybody does.)

IV. COURSE SCHEDULE

There are 7 modules in the course center. Each module has 2 lessons, each with its own assignment. Modules due dates and required readings are given below. Full module assignments will be posted in the course center at least one month prior to assignment due dates. The course schedule is as follows:

01 Module - Due June 18 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time

LESSON 01 - What IS Philosophy of Religion?!

reading assignment: Hasker 13-28; Reason and Religious Belief, 7-17.

LESSON 02 - Freedom and Responsibility

reading assignment: Hasker 29-55; excerpt from H. Frankfurt article.

PAPER DUE

Topic: Identify and critique the account of freedom implicit in the Westminster Confession

02 Module - Due June 27 11:59 p.m. ET

LESSON 03 - What are God's Attributes?

reading assignment: RRB 62-84; Selected Readings
124-129, 139-148

LESSON 04 - Traditional Arguments for God's Existence

reading assignment: RRB 85-114; SR 187-209, 218-230, 241-246

03 Module - Due July 10 11:59 p.m. ET

LESSON 05 - Faith and Reason

reading assignment: RRB 43-60; SR 67-71, 77-108

PAPER DUE

Topic: TBA

LESSON 06 - Justification for Religious Belief

reading assignment: RRB 146-165; SR 355-365

04 Module - Due July 19 11:59 p.m. ET

LESSON 07 - Religious Experience

reading assignment: RRB 18-41; SR 5-55

LESSON 08 - Miracles

reading assignment: RRB 190-210; SR 415-444

05 Module - Due August 04 11:59 p.m. ET

LESSON 09 - The Problem of Evil

reading assignment: RRB 116-145; SR 249-273, 287-326

PAPER DUE

Topic: TBA

LESSON 10 - Science and Religion

reading assignment: RRB 237-257; SR 497-530

06 Module - Due August 13 11:59 p.m. ET

LESSON 11 - Religious Language

reading assignment: RRB 166-188; SR 369-413

LESSON 12 - Mind-Body Issues

reading assignment: Hasker 57-80; RRB 212-236; SR 445-488

07 Module - Due August 27 11:59 p.m. ET

LESSON 13 - Religious Diversity

reading assignment: RRB 259-277; SR 539-570

LESSON 14 - Philosophy and Christian Doctrine

reading assignment: RRB 302-323; SR 597-629

PAPER DUE

Topic: TBA

*One final note on papers. Since I will be providing a discussion summary the day after each module is due, and since some of the discussion summaries will provide some of the 'answers' to the papers, it is important that papers are in on time. Late papers (unless arrangements are made in advance with the professor) are subject to grade reductions. Of course, the ExI program is designed with flexibility in mind; and I readily understand that unexpected events in ministry, at work, and at home can sometimes demand immediate attention.

So, please do feel free to let me know in advance if there is a problem with getting an assignment in on time. My experience has been that we can always work out some kind of arrangement.

V. HOW WE WILL COMMUNICATE WITH ONE ANOTHER

discussion center

Every lesson assignment will ask you to answer 2-4 questions and to respond/reply to 2 other classmates' answers.

If you have any general questions about assignments, sudden explanatory revelations regarding difficult material, etc.--**post all such items here**. Unless the class size is unduly small (which would be a rarity indeed), you will be assigned to a team. Each team will include up to ten students. Each team has its own Discussion Center; and your answers and responses to the questions for each lesson should be posted in **your team's Discussion Center**. Typically, I will not post responses in the discussion threads here—though I do read through all the answers and responses in each team's discussion center. If you have a particular question or issue that you would like me specifically to respond to, then please post such a question in the **general Discussion Center** to which the entire class has access. The day after each module is due, I will post a Discussion Summary of the material just covered. Given that my discussion summaries come after the assignments are due, please do feel free to post in the general Discussion Center any questions about the readings that crop up along the way. Also, if you have any general questions about assignments, please post such items in the general Discussion Center. Finally, if you have any prayer requests/praises (please feel free to post them), they can go here (as well as in Asbury's general 'Prayer News' folder, which the whole ExI community can read). The discussion center is a **Public Forum**, in that all of us in PH501xl can read and respond to all the messages posted there. This will be our primary method of communication with one another.

archive center

7-10 days after posting the discussion summary for each module/lessons, I will move all the threaded discussions from that module into the Archive Center. You can access and read any of the material in the Archive Center at any time during the semester, but the Archive Center will not allow you to post messages there.

my office

Any personal messages to me (problems getting an assignment in on time, suggestions for how the course structure might be altered/improved, etc.) should be sent to me at my office (click on "office" icon). This is a **Private Forum** in that

only I will see these messages, and my replies to you will go to your private mailbox.

Your assigned 4-5 page papers should be sent to **my office** via an attachment to an e-mail. (This is done by sending an e-mail to my office and attaching your paper, which you will save as an ".rtf document" (or .doc document if you use Microsoft Word as I do).

my phone

If calling from the USA, my phone number is 011 44 01865 553261. Please note that I live in England and am 5 hours ahead of Eastern Time. The cheapest way to talk personally to me is to meet me in an Exl chat room. This can be arranged by e-mailing me and then agreeing with me on a time we can both be online together so that we can meet in the chat room.

chat room

Anytime someone else from our PH501 class or from any other Exl class is online, you can invite that person(s) into a chat room. Other people are able to join an existing chat only by invitation. Unlike our threaded discussions in our PH501 discussion center, chat room messages are not saved; once you exit the chat room, your discussion is lost forever (unless you choose to copy the discussion and paste it in one of your other files).

VI. COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING ASSESSMENTS

There will be a separate assignment for each of the 14 lessons (2 lessons per module). In addition to the required readings found in each assignment, each assignment will ask you to answer 2-4 questions and to respond to two other classmates' posted answers. While we won't be too strict about making sure that every sentence is grammatically impeccable, we will stay away from 'cyber slang' and 'stream of consciousness' writing in these assignments. In addition to giving answers/responses for each of the fourteen lessons, you will be assigned four 4-5 page papers (double-spaced) during the course of the semester. These papers are to be **formal papers**. I'm of the firm opinion that, as ambassadors of Christ Jesus, we are called to communicate clearly to the world in which we find ourselves. Consequently, in assessing the overall line of argument in your papers, I will look to see whether that line of argument is clear, smooth, and uninterrupted by grammatical and spelling mistakes.

How grades will be assigned:

For each of the fourteen lessons, each student will be expected to give thoughtful answers to all assigned questions, as well as thoughtful responses to other

classmates' answers to the assigned questions. While these answers and responses will not be given a letter grade, they will constitute class participation that is required of all students. Having satisfied class participation requirements, students will be graded on a series of 4-5 page papers assigned during the course of the semester. While four papers will be assigned, students will only be required to submit three of the four papers; and class grades will be awarded based on the average of a student's three papers. Also, you may choose to submit all four papers. If you do submit all four papers, then (at the end of the semester when grades are averaged) your lowest-graded paper will be thrown out, and you will receive a grade based on the average of your three highest-graded papers.

VII. AVAILABLE EXL SUPPORT

Asbury has an excellent EXL staff to support you.

General EXL information – Kevin Osborn at exl_director@asburyseminary.edu

Technical support –at exl_support@asburyseminary.edu.

Bookstore orders/questions - exlbooks@asburyseminary.edu

The following information about Exl library support comes from Hannah Kirsch:

Obtaining library materials and reference assistance

All ExL students are encouraged to make use of local library; however, if such services are unavailable or inadequate, ExL students may also obtain library books and journal articles through the mail from Asbury Theological Seminary's B. L. Fisher Library. All requests for books and journal articles should be emailed to the ExL Reference Librarian, Hannah Kirsch (Hannah_Kirsch@asburyseminary.edu). Hannah is also available to assist ExL students with reference requests such as how to find citations for books and articles, how to use the various online databases available to ExL students, or how to begin looking for information on a specific topic.

To request material from the B.L. Fisher Library, begin by searching the library's WebPac (online catalog of the library's holdings) or one of the journal databases available on the ExL Virtual Library webpage (found in the Resource Center of your ExL classroom). Then send an email to Hannah citing the sources that you would like to request. If you need help searching the databases, do not hesitate to ask. Please allow 5-10 business days for all requests to be filled. ExL students are billed for the cost of photocopies (5 cents per page) and the cost of shipping. Express mail services (price varies according to weight) and faxing (\$1.50 for the first page and 25 cents for each additional page plus photocopy charges) are also available, but material will generally take 1-2 days from the receipt of the request to be processed.

Plan ahead and make your requests early.

VIII. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

While part of our learning experience will include uncovering for ourselves what certain terms mean, it might prove helpful if we have a glossary of some basic terms found in the philosophical literature before we begin reading. Feel free to keep this glossary handy as you read through the material.

a priori: Prior to experience. Take, for example, the three line argument: (1) All bachelors are unmarried; (2) Bob is a bachelor; (3) Therefore, Bob is unmarried. You do not need any experiences in the world to evaluate this argument. You only need to know the meaning of the word 'bachelor'.

a posteriori: Following experience. Take, for example, the three line argument: (1) All bachelors have brown hair; (2) Bob is a bachelor; (3) Therefore, Bob has brown hair. To evaluate this argument, you will need to rely on your experiences about the world--e.g., whether you've ever seen or heard others talk about bachelors with blond or red hair.

apologetics: The task of providing a defense for one's beliefs.

causal relation: This is how the connection between two events is described when one event (e.g., a breeze blowing) is said to be the cause of another event (e.g., a pencil rolling across a desk).

cumulative case argument: An argument which proceeds from several separate pieces of evidence to a conclusion which best explains that evidence.

deductive argument: An argument which necessarily/logically follows from premises to a conclusion. Take, for example, the two premises: (1) All bachelors are unmarried; and (2) Bob is a bachelor. If these two premises are true, then it is definitely/necessarily/logically the case that the conclusion--'Bob is unmarried'-is true.

e.g.: Abbreviation for 'for example'.

epistemology: The study of human knowing--i.e., how humans come to form beliefs and know things.

i.e.: Abbreviation for 'that is', or 'in other words'.

inductive argument: As opposed to a deductive argument, and inductive argument is one in which the conclusion is made probable by the premises. Take, for instance, the argument: (1) Most bachelors have brown hair; (2) Bob is a bachelor; (3) Therefore, Bob probably has brown hair. A cumulative case argument is one kind of inductive argument.

modus ponens: A deductive argument of the form: (1) If p, then q; (2) p; (3) Therefore, q. For example: (1) If I hear a knocking sound, then someone is at the door; (2) I hear a knocking sound; (3) Therefore, someone must be at the door.

modus tolens: A deductive argument of the form: (1) If p, then q; (2) not q; (3) Therefore, not p. For example: (1) If I hear a knocking sound, then someone is at the door; (2) No one is at the door; (3) Therefore, I can be sure I'm not hearing a knocking sound. BUT BE CAREFUL! Unlike modus tolens, the following is NOT a valid argument: (1) If p, then q; (2) not p; (3) Therefore not q. For example, it is not a valid argument to claim: (1) If I hear a knocking sound, then someone is at the door; (2) I don't hear a knocking sound; (3) Therefore, there is no one at the door.

natural theology: The study of God from the natural world, apart from special revelation (e.g., scripture).

necessary cause: Some cause, C, the occurrence of which is necessary for the occurrence of some effect, E. In other words, the only way in which E (the flooding of a town in five minutes) can occur is by C (the breaking of a dam) occurring and causing E to occur.

ontology: The study of being in its most general terms.

sound argument: A deductive argument that is valid and has all true premises (and conclusion). Consider the following argument: (1) All bachelors have brown hair; (2) Bob is a bachelor; (3) Therefore, Bob has brown hair. This is a valid argument, as there is no logical error in the argument. However, the first premise is clearly not true. Thus, the entire argument, while valid, is not sound.

special revelation: Information about God which comes from a special and unique revelatory act of God.

theodicy: Explanations for the problem of evil intending to justify God in allowing evil to occur.

valid argument: A deductive argument in which the conclusion follows logically from the premises. Take, for example, the argument used in our previous definition of a 'deductive argument'. Note: An argument can be valid without being sound.